With a chance to become an Orioles ball girl on the line, Elisabeth Manning knew she needed to impress the judges.

The Silver Spring, MD, resident—and then-Salisbury University student—was trying to make herself stand out among 80 applicants in March.

After an interview and a crowd-cheering exercise, Manning’s fielding ability was tested.

“I remember thinking that I needed to do something special to stand out to the judges,” she said. “So, the last ball that was hit to me I decided to catch between my legs. All of the judges really seemed to like it, and apparently it worked, because the next day I got a call saying I had made it to the final 10.”

Being a finalist meant Manning would have an opportunity to be at Camden Yards, fielding errant balls and interacting with fans.

“A couple weeks after that, I found out I was going to be one of the five ball girls chosen for the 2009 season,” she said.

|Manning (center) with her parents Mary and Dennis, brother Matt, a 2008 SU alumnus who is currently working as a U.S. Park Police Officer, and sister Katherine, a junior in high school who hopes to become a Sea Gull in 2011.

Joke To Reality

An e-mail pushed Manning to try out.

“My dad actually saw the press release about the tryouts and forwarded it to me as a joke, saying that I was the only person he knew that would actually go and tryout,” she said. “I looked at my calendar and did not have anything important going on at school the weekend of the tryouts, so I called him and said I was definitely going to do it.”

Manning played softball in high school and in intramural leagues at SU, but fielding at Camden Yards gave her pause.

“I played first base and have a first-base mitt that I absolutely love,” she said. “However, it is perfectly broken in for a softball, so I was kind of nervous that the baseball would fall out of the big pocket. The morning of the tryouts, I made my dad hit me a few grounders just to be sure that I was not going to embarrass myself.”

Manning joined a group that worked about six to seven Orioles games a month. When she took a full-time job in Washington (Manning graduated from SU with a finance degree in May), her workload went down to weekends only.

On game days, ball girls arrive about 90 minutes before the start, meet with their supervisor, help with pregame ceremonies and interact with fans. Once the last note of the national anthem is sung, the ball girls go to work.

“We each go to our respective stools, either in left field or right field, and are there for the whole game,” Manning said. How much action a ball girl sees varies.

“I have had a few games where I have gotten like six or seven foul balls hit my way and other games with none,” Manning said. “Regardless, it is fun either way.”

Calling It A Career

Manning has enjoyed her time at the ballpark.

“Ever since I was a little kid, my dad has been taking my brother and I to games at Camden Yards and I just love being there,” she said. “... Even though I have been a ball girl since April, I still get excited when famous players are walking past me on the field. Also, it just puts a huge smile on my face when little kids want to get my autograph or a picture with me. I think back to all of my great memories and it makes me happy that I am helping to create a great memory for another family.”

But there are things Manning tries to forget.

“The worst part of being a ball girl is if I mis or bobble a ball,” she said. “Obviously, the team does not get charged an error if a ball girl misplays a ball, but it is still pretty embarrassing.”

Manning enjoyed being a ball girl. However, with a full-time job, retirement loomed.

“Being a ball girl has hands down been one of the coolest experiences of my life,” she said. “... It was the perfect time in my life to be a ball girl, because I just wanted to do something fun that I knew I would never be able to do again.”

Editor’s Note: Elizabeth Manning ’09 is putting her finance degree to good use working as a contractor to the U.S. Navy in Washington, D.C.